



## Constrain (Performance)

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# Inter sections

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## Constrain (Performance)

### Dominic Thorpe

Supervised by: Brian Connolly & Dr. Chérie Driver



*Constrain. Performance by Dominic Thorpe. Mobius Boston. 2018. Images taken by Jordan Hutchings*

*Constrain* was a live performance presented in Transactions 2, Mobius, Boston 2018, an engagement between Mobius and Bbeyond Belfast. The performance, presented in public space, comes from research examining if and how performance artists address experiences and identities of perpetrators when making work responding to human rights abuses, atrocity and conflict.

The late Brendan Smith, convicted prolific paedophile and Catholic priest, worked for a time in Boston as well as other parts of the US and Ireland. Photographs of Smith, published widely in the media at the time of his arrest, extradition and trial, presented disturbing and challenging images, that were seemingly impermeable to extracting a sense of Smith's identity outside the inconceivable. In light of the realities of his abuses, one such image showing Smith's impervious and impenitent open-mouthed smile towards the camera, underpins a ubiquitous media narrative of evil monster. This narrative is problematic to an extent, in that it frames the absence of humanity as explanation for his choices and actions. However, attempting to productively challenge limited narratives is fraught with difficulty and risk, not least due to the inviolable victim status of the many children he abused.



The basis of *Constrain* was developed from paying acute attention to certain physical registers of resistance that emerged in my own struggle to penetrate this specific photograph. A tension in my forehead and stomach along with a rotating neck movement were very slight sensations recurring on repeated engagement with the image, as I contended with its content and context. Registering and working from my own bodily responses represented a reverse of focus, from the apparent impenetrability of the image to illumination of my own struggle in productively engaging Smith on broader terms. As a result, presenting and interpreting embodied characteristics of resistance through performance established grounds to challenge the decisiveness of the image by asking questions of my own openness towards a more complex understanding of Smith and his actions.